



AFCARS Acceptance Test Guidance

Bulletin #13

September 9, 1995

States in development of their Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Systems (SACWIS) should consider including the following in the acceptance test of their system to confirm that the SACWIS will meet the requirements of AFCARS.

1 DATA COLLECTION:

- 1.1 ensure all data elements listed in the AFCARS Final Rule (Federal Register vol. 58, 244, Dec. 22, 1993, pages 67931-67934) are in the system or can be derived from collected data.
- 1.2 ensure definitions of collected data elements match AFCARS definitions as presented in the *AFCARS Guide to the Elements*, including especially:
 - Local Agency FIPS Code (FC #3) represents the code of location of agency responsible for child not location of child's placement setting
 - Hispanic origin elements (FC #9, FC #53, FC #55, AD #8, AD #26, and AD #28) are collected so that they can be reported separately from race elements
 - disability information (FC #10-15, FC #33, AD #10-15) is collected so that system can differentiate between those disabilities that are clinically diagnosed and those that are not
 - date of latest removal (FC #21) indicates the date when the child was *removed* from home for the current episode
 - transaction dates (FC #22 and #57) are collected according to AFCARS specifications (i.e., they reflect the date that the corresponding information was entered for the first time into a child's computer record and do not change with updates)
 - the system can distinguish conditions that are associated with removal (FC #26-40) *at the time of removal* from those conditions that were discovered *after* the child was removed
 - information regarding whether a child is receiving title IV-A funding (FC #61) is collected so that system can differentiate between AFDC and other IV-A funding (i.e., emergency assistance)
 - total amount of monthly funding being paid (FC #66) is being collected as of April 1, 1996 and includes *all* sources including private

- system will not allow a date of latest removal (FC #21) to be entered that is prior to the date of discharge (FC #56) from the last episode
 - system will not allow date of discharge from foster care (FC #56) to be earlier than date of latest removal (FC #21)
 - primary basis for determination of special needs (AD #10) is the *primary* reason that the State has determined that the child is special needs
 - child receiving a monthly subsidy (AD #35) is collected so that system can detect if child is receiving regular subsidies (Federal or State), which are to be included, or receiving other payments
 - system will not allow child's birth date (FC #6 and AD #5) to be before parents' birth dates (FC #45, FC #46, FC #50, FC #51, AD #16, AD #17, AD #23, and AD #24)
- 1.3 minimum information (including dates of removal and dates of discharge) on all episodes remains in system or in archives until child reaches the maximum age of eligibility for child welfare services as determined by State law and regulation.
- 1.4 State elements map to AFCARS elements properly, including:
- there are no cases where one State value maps to more than one AFCARS value
 - all AFCARS values have *at least one* State value mapped to them
 - information not collected for a particular record (for whatever reason) is mapped as all blanks (not all zeros, all 9's, etc.).
 - age at previous adoption (FC #17) uses birthday and date of legalization of adoption to determine age
 - date of first removal from home (FC #18) is always the date that the **FIRST** episode began and never changes even if the child has additional episodes
 - uses AFCARS definition of "episode" when counting number of removals from home (FC #19)
 - date of discharge from last episode (FC #20) indicates discharge from previous episode (if any)
 - calculates number of previous placement settings during episode (FC #24) correctly (i.e., does not count runaway, trial home visit, pre-adoptive home

under certain circumstances, etc. and *does* include the current placement)

- physical abuse (alleged/reported) (FC #26) includes alleged and not just substantiated
- sexual abuse (alleged/reported) (FC #27) includes alleged and not just substantiated
- neglect (alleged/reported) (FC #28) includes alleged and not just substantiated
- current placement setting (FC #41) map according to AFCARS definitions (i.e., setting should be coded as group home if 7-12 children are served, institution if more, foster home if less)
- caretaker family structure (FC #44) represents the structure of the family *at the time of removal*
- foster parent data (FC #49-55) are not included if current placement setting is not a foster home *by AFCARS definitions*

2 DATA EXTRACTION

- 2.1 system should extract all records to be included with submission according to the "Permanent Data Extraction Method" in Program Instruction ACF-PI-CB-95-09, Reissued May 23, 1995 (i.e. records are pulled based on the transaction date of discharge)
- 2.2 for children who are in care on the last day of the reporting period, information as of the last day of period is extracted
- 2.3 for children who were discharged during the period, information on the most recent episode is extracted
- 2.4 all elements are extracted

3 SUBMISSION FILE CREATION

- 3.1 file must be created and received at ACF in ASCII format
- 3.2 each date element is formatted according to its AFCARS specification (i.e. either yymmdd, yymm, or yy)
- 3.3 all elements are right justified and padded with zeros to the left where necessary
- 3.4 summary files are created for each file (i.e. foster care and/or adoption) that is being

submitted according to instructions in technical bulletin #2

- 3.5 delimiters are included only for files being submitted (e.g. if a foster care file is being submitted then include a "@" according to technical bulletin #2)
- 3.6 files concatenated in right order (according to bulletin #2)
- 3.7 optional footnotes may be attached if desired (in proper format, according to technical bulletin #3)
- 3.8 State FIPS code is inserted into each record
- 3.9 proper report date (formatted as yymm) is inserted into each record
- 3.10 highly recommended that data be edit checked prior to transmission using the AFCARS Penalty Calculation Utility software (see Technical Assistance Bulletin #12)

4 TRANSMISSION

- 4.1 create new file with record numbers either encrypted (according to guidance in bulletin #10 or using supplied utility) or sequentially numbered. If creating sequential numbers, maintain crosswalk table for a minimum of six reporting periods
- 4.2 CONNECT: Direct registration request is submitted to ACF; communications link is established and tested; and data transmission to ACF is successfully completed

Note:

For copies of the AFCARS *Final Rule*, *Program Instruction*, and the *Guide to the Elements*, contact:
Administration for Children and Families
Children's Bureau
Washington, D.C.
Attention: AFCARS Project

Technical Bulletins referenced in this document are available via the AFCARS Forum on the ACF Bulletin Board System (BBS).